

India accuses Pakistan of shelling school in Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Pakistani troops shelled a school in Indian-administered Kashmir which had been earmarked as a polling station in upcoming state elections, injuring a police constable, a defence spokesman said yesterday.

The shelling occurred overnight in the southern Nowshera area of Rajouri district along the Line of Control (LoC) separating India and Pakistan in disputed Kashmir, the spokesman said.

The Pakistani troops, he said, had also targeted a number of other Indian positions in the area.

The school was being guarded by a number of police constables ahead of the first phase on September 16 of legislative polls in Indian Kashmir, which Islamic militants have vowed to disrupt.

The injured constable had been admitted to hospital but was out of danger.

Pakistan and India have massed around a million troops on their common borders since tensions between the two nuclear rivals erupted in December following an attack on the Indian parliament which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militants.

Police here, meanwhile, reported that two Islamic militants were killed Thursday in a firefight with India's security forces in the Poonch district, about 240 kilometres (150 miles) west of Jammu.



An excavating machine digs up earth on a road under construction near Ciudad Delgado, El Salvador on Wednesday. Trees are also falling victim to construction as residents of the area and ecologist protest to stop the work, pointing that the destruction of the trees will affect the area's ecosystem.

Israel shelling kills four in Gaza

Hamas vows tougher retaliation than ever

AFP, Gaza

Israeli tank shells killed four members of a Palestinian family in the Gaza Strip early yesterday hours after the army took the first steps towards implementing a partial withdrawal in the area.

The second raid on the Gaza Strip in two days sparked furious reactions from the Palestinians, with a top adviser to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat describing the shelling as a "massacre" and the radical Hamas vowing tougher retaliation than ever.

Israeli tanks stormed the Sheikh Ajeen neighbourhood south of Gaza City shortly after midnight, killing Rueda al-Hajeen, 55, her sons Ashraf, 22, and Nuhad, 17, as well as her nephew, Mohammad, 17, Palestinian medical sources said.

According to an AFP reporter on the scene, Palestinian ambulances rushed to the scene but were barred by the Israeli army from rescuing the injured.

While the shelling that ripped through the neighbourhood killed Rueda and Mohammad on the spot, Ashraf and Mihad died to death during the hour that elapsed before medical services could arrive.

"We were sleeping in our homes when suddenly, we heard a bomb. Israeli tanks were invading the area, firing and shelling in all directions, and then I saw the al-Hajeen's house on fire," said Ismail Shamallakh, a neighbour whose house was also damaged in the incursion.

"Me and my brother tried to help bring the injured to shelter, but we had to run away under Israeli fire," he told AFP.

Five other people were wounded in the shelling, all of them Rueda's sons, medical sources said. One of them, Mohammad, was said to be in serious condition.

The army said it had spotted "suspect individuals" in the area. It later added that it was looking into the incident, a month after 17 people, including 15 civilians, were slain in a controversial "targeted killing" against a Hamas military leader.

Ismail Haniya, a senior leader of the radical Islamic group Hamas vowed bloody retaliation for the killing. "Our response will be a new escalation in our resistance," he told AFP.

Hamas' smaller rival, Islamic Jihad, also expressed its ire, and both groups called on the Palestinian Authority to stop all its contacts with Israel.

Top Arafat adviser Nabil Abu Rudeina branded the attack a "massacre," saying it was aimed at sabotaging efforts to obtain a progressive Israeli military withdrawal from Palestinian areas that have been reoccupied since the start of the intifada in September 2000.

But he said a meeting would go ahead between Palestinian interior minister Abdel Razaq al-Yahya and Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer on the next steps to take under the arrangement, which led to a troop withdrawal from the southern West Bank of Bethlehem 10 days ago.

Yayha himself confirmed to the Lebanese daily An-Nahar the meeting would take place, and added that a possible withdrawal from Hebron would be on the agenda.

The third security meeting between the two officials was slated for Wednesday but was called off by Israel, prompting Palestinian accusations that the Jewish state was attempting to renounce its commitment to a phased withdrawal.

Hours before the bloodbath south of Gaza City, in a timid move to keep the fledgling security pact alive, the army handed over security positions to

Palestinian forces in the Gaza Strip late Wednesday.

"Under the understanding between Israel and the Palestinians on the Gaza Strip, Palestinian police went back to a number of posts, to enforce the law and order and alleviate the pressure on the population," military sources said Thursday.

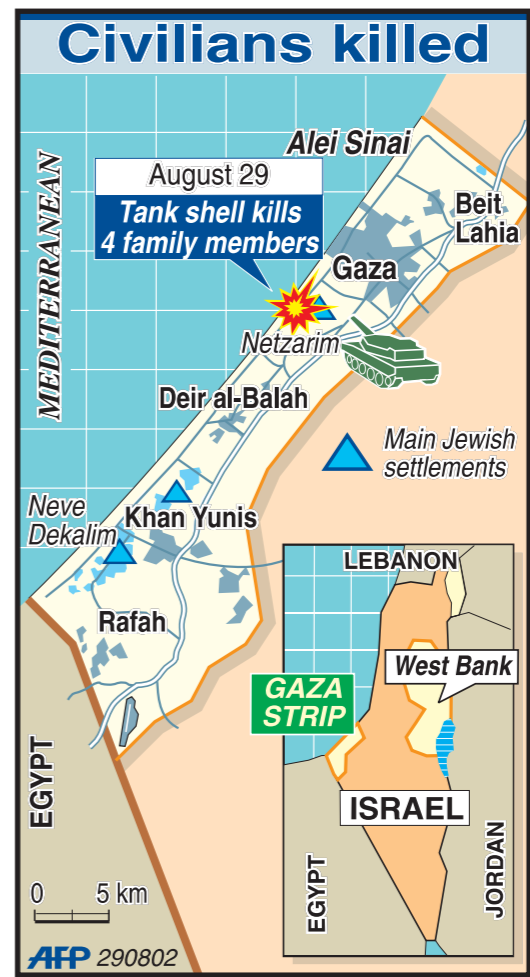
US envoy David Satterfield arrived in the region Wednesday to discuss the state of the Palestinian reforms and try to rescue the faltering security arrangements, aimed at putting an end to the two-year-old spiral of violence that has left 2,462 people dead.

The deputy assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs met with top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat and was due to hold talks with Israeli officials on Thursday.

Despite a prolonged respite for Israelis, with the most recent suicide attack coming nearly a month ago, Satterfield's visit comes against a backdrop of renewed violence in the occupied territories, as Israel continued its West Bank sweep for suspected militants.

In overnight and pre-dawn raids, Israeli troops nabbed seven Palestinians in Dahariyeh, south of Hebron, one in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus, one in the northern town of Tulkarem and two more in Hitzma, north of Jerusalem, an army spokesman said.

Two were also arrested in the Gaza Strip near the Gush Katif settlement bloc, shortly after a large explosive charge was discovered in the area, the spokesman said.



Israel grip on Palestinians to result in humanitarian crisis: UN

AFP, Jerusalem

UN special coordinator for the Middle East Terje Roed-Larsen yesterday warned that the Palestinian population was facing an imminent "human catastrophe," and urged Israel to reconsider its security policies.

He revealed preliminary figures on the soaring levels of unemployment, income losses and poverty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, ahead of a full report due to be released in September.

Those estimates show that overall unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip rocketed from 36 percent to "approximately 50 per cent" during the second quarter of 2002.

Roed-Larsen pointed out that on days when crippling curfews locked between 600,000 and 900,000 Palestinians in their homes, the unemployment rate rose to 63.3 percent in the West Bank, east Jerusalem excluded.

The figures he presented also revealed that total Palestinian income losses stood at 7.6 million dollars per day, bringing the tally to 3.3 billion dollars since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising on September 28, 2000.

Benazir's legal challenge against polls ban postponed

AFP, Karachi

A Pakistani court yesterday postponed until September 11 the hearing of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's challenge to a law which bars her from contesting October's elections.

The petition was to have been heard by a five-judge bench at the Sindh provincial High Court, but proceedings were adjourned because Bhutto's senior counsel was sick, attorney Farooq Naik said.

"The court adjourned the hearing following our submission that the senior member of her legal team, Kamal Azfar, was not well and could not turn up," Naik told AFP.

Bhutto, who has been living in self-exile in London and Dubai since 1998, is contesting a decree by President Pervez Musharraf made earlier this month barring "absconders" from running for public office.

She is accused of a range of corruption charges stemming from her two terms as prime minister.

Musharraf warns of negative impact of US attack on Iraq

Pak president denies claims constitutional change for consolidation of his position

AFP, London

A US military attack on Iraq would have "really negative repercussions" on the Islamic world, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf warned in a BBC radio interview yesterday.

Though the Pakistani government still backs US President George W Bush's war on terrorism, "that doesn't mean we can start participating in activities all around the world," Musharraf said.

"We've got too much on our hands here in this region to get involved in anything else, especially when one is very conscious that this (a US attack) will have really negative repercussions around the

Islamic world," he said.

Musharraf, who faces general elections on October 10, was interviewed late Wednesday night by BBC radio's Today program at his heavily guarded offices in Rawalpindi.

In excerpts released earlier in Islamabad, Musharraf denied that changes earlier this month to Pakistan's constitution were made to strengthen his position ahead of the polls.

Asked what might be the negative effects of a US military attack on Iraq, Musharraf said: "I think it will alienate the Islamic world more."

"It's already dangerous that all political disputes at the moment all around the world are, unfortunately,

involving Muslims, and Muslims are feeling that they are on the receiving end everywhere," he said.

Within Pakistan, "feelings against the United States will increase certainly," the president said, though he doubted that his own position would be endangered.

Musharraf doubted the ability of al-Qaida -- responsible for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon -- to rebuild itself after nearly a year of conflict in Afghanistan.

"I think they've been dealt with very strongly, and I don't think they can develop an infrastructure of the kind that existed, especially when a stable government is in Afghanistan," he said.

"If at all there is instability in Afghanistan, that could give rise to al-Qaeda or some other extremist elements strengthening themselves again," he said.

On whether al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was dead or alive, Musharraf replied: "My guess 'til now is that, more likely, he's dead. More likely. But again it's a guess. I can't say."

"If he was on this side of the border, because of the bodyguards he keeps, I'm sure he'd be in a group," he said.

"And the reward against him, I think, it's a very lucrative award for anybody here, any tribal here. I'm sure someone would have indicated."

Sharif granted preliminary permission to contest polls

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani election authorities yesterday granted preliminary permission to exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his wife Begum Kulsoom Nawaz to contest the October elections, officials said.

Nomination papers for Sharif and Kulsoom, who are in exile in Saudi Arabia with almost 20 members of the Sharif clan, were filed in separate constituencies in their home city of Lahore in Pakistan's east.

However the former first couple's candidacies could still be blocked if appeals are filed against them by September 6, election official Shaukat Iqbal said.

WTC attack plans began in 2000

German authorities garner strong evidence

AP, Karlsruhe, Germany

German authorities have evidence the Hamburg al-Qaida cell that included three of the September 11 suicide pilots was planning an attack on the World Trade Center as early as April or May 2000, the country's federal prosecutor said yesterday.

Announcing charges against Mounir El Motassadeq, the only person apprehended in Germany in connection with the attacks, federal Prosecutor Kay Nehm said the Hamburg hijackers were planning an attack on the United States in October 1999 and had chosen their target six months later.

Nehm said hijacker Marwan Al-Shehhi told a librarian there would be an attack on the World Trade

Center. "There will be thousands of dead. You will all think of me," Al-Shehhi told the librarian, according to Nehm.

El Motassadeq, a 28-year-old Moroccan citizen arrested in Hamburg two months after the attacks, was charged Wednesday with more than 3,000 counts of accessory to murder and membership in a terrorist organisation.

The Hamburg cell included hijackers Mohamed Atta, Al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah. Authorities believe Atta and Al-Shehhi piloted the planes that crashed into the World Trade Center, while Jarrah piloted the plane that crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

In laying out the charges against El Motassadeq, Nehm gave a

detailed account of how the Hamburg cell was formed and how the hijackers trained for their suicide mission, including attending camps in Afghanistan, flight schools in the United States, and meetings across Europe.

"All of the members of this cell shared the same religious convictions, an Islamic lifestyle, a feeling of being out of place in unfamiliar cultural surroundings that they weren't used to," Nehm said. "At the centre of this stood the hatred of the world Jewry and the United States."

El Motassadeq was responsible for supporting the suicide pilots, arranging for financing of their activities, including paying for flight schools in Florida, Nehm said.

Others in support roles included

Ramsi Binalshibh, Said Bahaji, and Zakariya Essabar, for whom German authorities have issued international arrest warrants.

"The accused was just as involved in preparing the attacks up until the end as the others who remained in Hamburg," Nehm said. "He was aware of the commitment to mount a terror attack against the targets chosen by the cell and he supported the planning and preparation for these attacks through multiple activities."

El Motassadeq was an electrical engineering student at Hamburg's Technical University from 1995 until his arrest - the same school where Atta, 33, and Al-Shehhi, 23, studied before leaving Germany last year for the United States.

US charges 6 with terror support

AP, Detroit

When federal agents raided a Detroit apartment shortly after September 11, they found three men living in what was essentially a flophouse, with no beds and garbage bags full of clothing.

A search of the apartment resulted in an alarming discovery: a cache of false documents, a day planner detailing planned attacks in Turkey and Jordan and a videotape that appeared to case U.S. landmarks such as Disneyland in California and the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

Karim Koubriti, Ahmed Hannan and Farouk Ali-Haimoud were taken into custody and charged with fraud and misuse of visas. At the time, officials said they were really looking for another man whose name

appeared on the mailbox.

But on Wednesday, the three were among six men charged by federal grand juries with conspiring to support Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network.

US officials said they expected several more such indictments in coming months as the FBI, Customs Service and other federal agencies attempt to block money and operational support from the United States from reaching terror groups overseas.

Agents believe they have uncovered a broad effort by US residents - many of whom are citizens or legal residents - to use credit card thefts, illegal cigarette sales, diverted charitable funds and cash smuggled in airline luggage to enrich terror groups, the officials said.